Who needs adult coloring books? Try these 5 unusual art forms from around the world

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We've all been there: The glowing screen. That menacingly blank document. Fingers poised above the keyboard.... Nothing. You're attempting to outline that new marketing strategy, that lengthy report (or that article about art around the world)... but it feels like someone took your head and shook all the ideas out your left ear. This blockage might be happening because you're not spending enough time strengthening, rejuvenating and stimulating the creative side of your mind (...and clearly I'm not either).

Studies show that looking at and partaking in visual arts can do wonders for your brain. It serves as an antidepressant, keeps the mind sharp and decreases stress levels. So pick up that paintbrush, stroll through an gallery or go crazy with the glitter glue—these creative visual arts from around the world will stimulate your inner Michelangelo and keep the genius juices flowing.

1. WAX ON, FABRIC DYE, WAX OFF

Whether cloaking human shoulders, brightening up a table or enhancing a drab wall, the intricate textile art of **batik** is versatile and widespread, but its exact origin is unknown. A fabric dyeing technique that involves using wax as a repellent, batik traces back to the Middle East, Peru, Egypt, Japan, Europe and Central Asia as far back as 2,000 years, but is most prevalent in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. To get batik-ing **on your own**, stock up on wax, fabric, dye, and a means for boiling water. Use a brush or stamp to apply melted wax to the fabric (traditionally cotton or silk), then dip and dye. Once the dye dries, boil and wash the cloth to remove the wax, and repeat the whole process—many times—until you get the colors and designs you'd like.

No place on Earth has this waxy craft dialed better than Java, Indonesia. Brilliant batik flows in abundance here, where genuine, handmade designs distinguish themselves from faux, mass-produced patterns. Visit a batik factory like **Batik Winotosastro** to watch the process in action, or try your own hand stateside in a **workshop**.

2. CARVING: NOT JUST FOR PUMPKINS...

Speaking of things that have been around for a long time, our next blank canvas happens to be one of the oldest cultivated crops around the globe. Kind of goofy looking but ridiculously useful, the common gourd is like the **Ostrich Pillow** or **Goggle Umbrella** of the produce world. It's also got some serious clout in the art community: In addition to being utilized as a musical instrument, a vessel for hauling water, a dry goods storage container and even birdhouses, this wonky-shaped crop once served as a primitive canvas for indigenous people who etched stories into the fruit's hard outer skin. Gourds have been used throughout history in almost every culture across the globe, helping to to preserve vanishing stories and paint a picture of everyday life from back in the day.

Next time you find yourself traveling through Peru, seek opportunities to watch this fascinating **disappearing craft** in action. Inspired to give it a whirl? Search for classes near you (it's more popular than you think—there's even an **American Gourd Society**). Contemporary uses can be found here in the U.S., where the **Cherokee Nation** still uses gourds for making masks, and the **Amish community** uses them for wall decor and vases.

3. ONE MAN'S GARBAGE IS ANOTHER MAN'S...MAN CAVE?

For this, you'll need to do some digging—we're talking chest-high in the local scrap yard or dump, tossing slimy banana peels and Cap'n Crunch boxes over your shoulder with zero inhibitions and a maniacal laugh…that deep. But really, **junk art** is perhaps one of the most creative forms of expression around. It forces new perspective and the kind of avant-garde scrappiness that spawns singular spectacles like **Nitt Witt Ridge** or **Forevertron.**

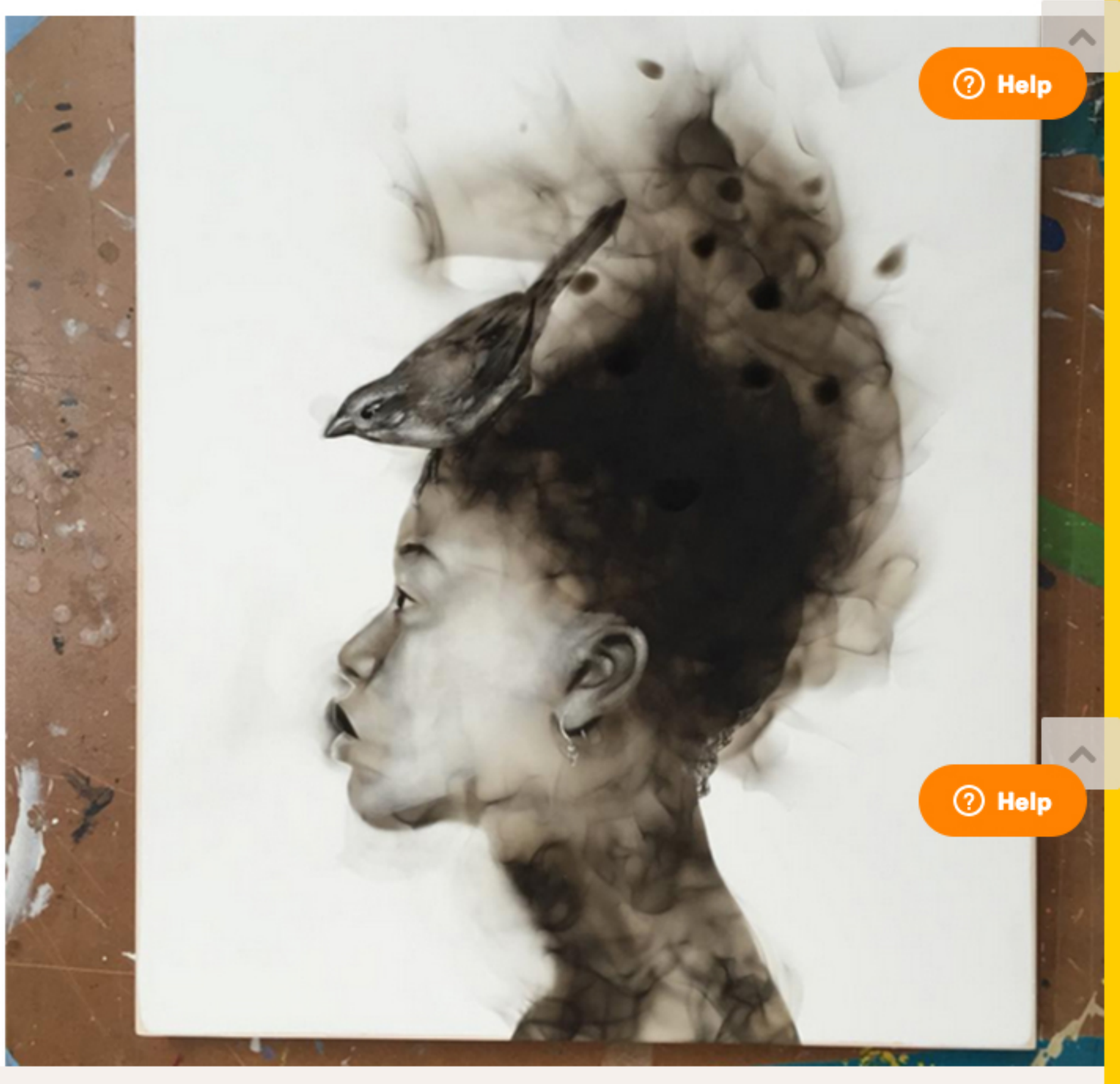
One look at Vince Hannemann's **Cathedral of Junk** in Austin, Texas, demonstrates the kind of garbage grandeur one can achieve with a little ingenuity and some elbow grease. This multi-level mansion of car bumpers, broken lawn mowers, cracked CDs and everything else under the sun is nearly 30 years in the making, drawing a steady stream of inquisitive gawkers. What compels Hannemann to continue embellishing his whimsical castle of clutter that's even hosted wedding receptions and bachelor parties? **He just likes it.** Not sure where to start? Here's some **inspiration.**

4. THE DISH-BREAKER'S DELIGHT

This art form certainly isn't rare. In fact, **Mosaics** can be found in myriad environments, transforming ordinary spaces into textural masterpieces with patchwork bursts of color. That's exactly what makes this art form so fabulous—the ability to metamorphose something strictly utilitarian into something utterly extravagant. The practice of festooning surfaces with re-purposed pieces of broken stone, porcelain, glass and pottery dates back to Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium B.C. And in all those centuries, one thing has remained fairly constant: It's still a painstaking pain in the butt (but the outcome is so worth it). Find a beginner's class in a **city near you** and see if you've got an inner **Isaiah Zagar.**

For inspiration, head to Barcelona to witness the work of Antoni Gaudí, one of the most revered architect-artists in the world (or, you know, Google him). Known for intricate and surreal work gracing magnificent structures like the **Sagrada Familia**, **Park Güell**, and **Casa Battló**, Gaudí is basically the Dr. Seuss of the mosaic world.

5. PAINTING WITH FIRE



Calling all artsy pyromaniacs: This one's for you. In the 1930s, Austrian-Mexican surrealist Wolfgang Paalen popularized **fumage**—a technique that involves holding a lit candle or kerosene lamp under a canvas, then forming designs with soot. Paalen combined the fumage technique with oil paint to create pieces like "**Forbidden Land**," from which he gained international recognition. His smoky works of art led him to be called "The Father of Fumage," although the practice can be traced back to prehistoric times.

Salvador Dalí later adopted this fiery technique in some of his methods, but dubbed it "sfumato." The Tate Modern Museum in London is a great place to see some of Dalí's sfumato surrealism, including "**Autumnal Cannibalism**" and "**King of Aragon**." For some modern-day examples, watch **Steven Spazuk** in action as he uses brushes, feathers or metal scrapers to create ethereal sooty masterpieces.

Next time you're seeking a little imagination stimulation, or just need **something new to do on a rainy day**, take a whack at a new type of art. Who knows? You'll be surprised at the masterpieces you can make with the contents of your recycling bin, a lighter or some broken old plates... and your brain will thank you, too.

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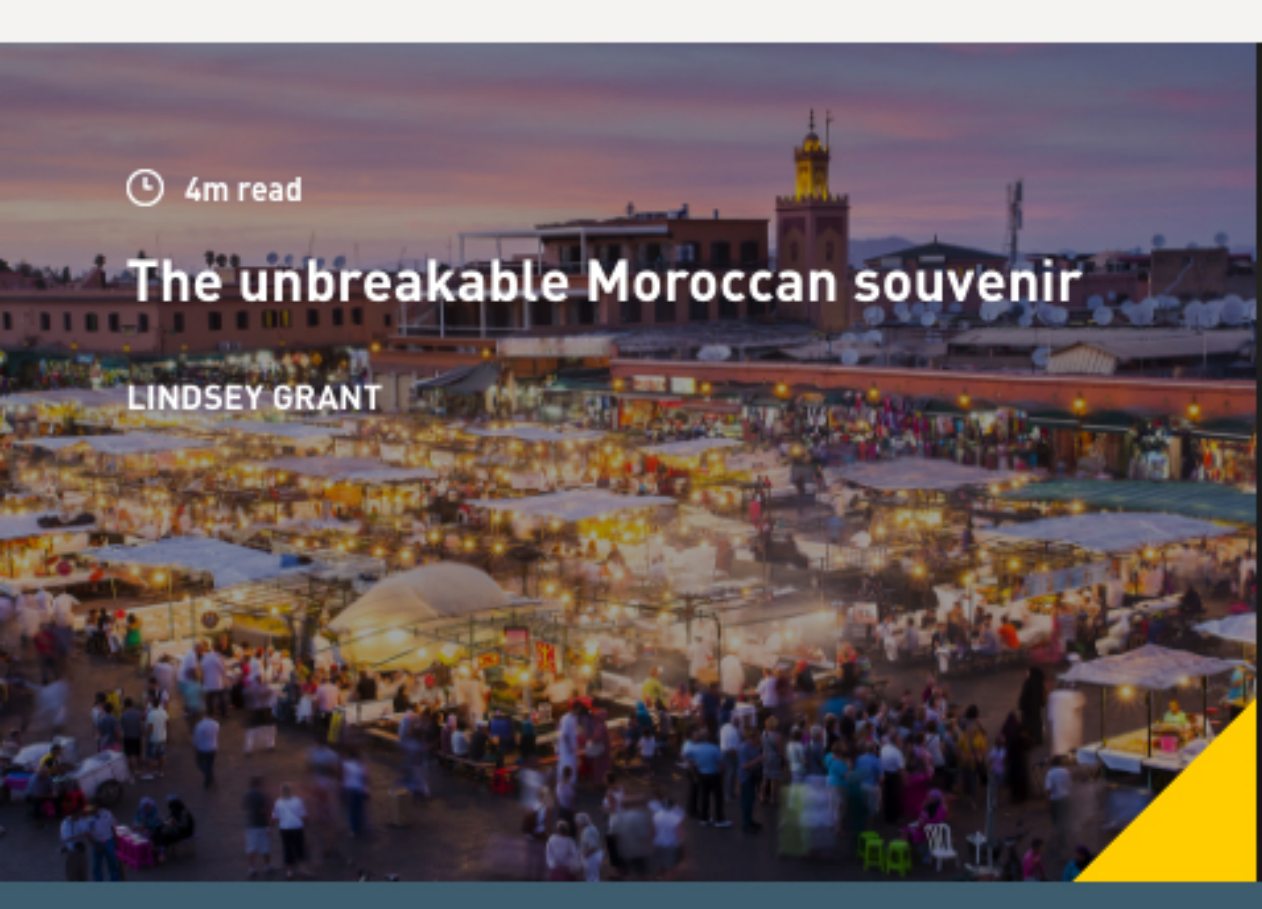

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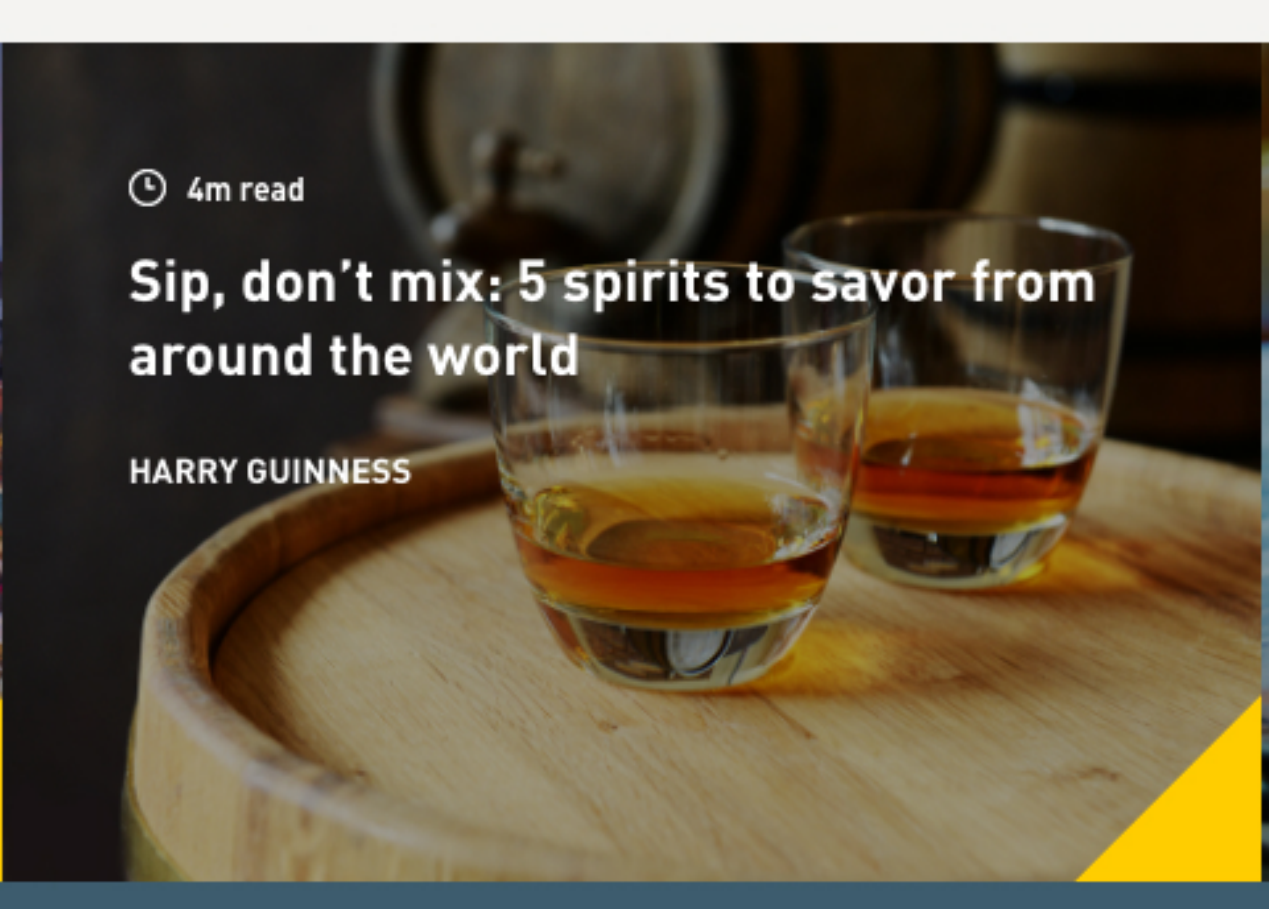

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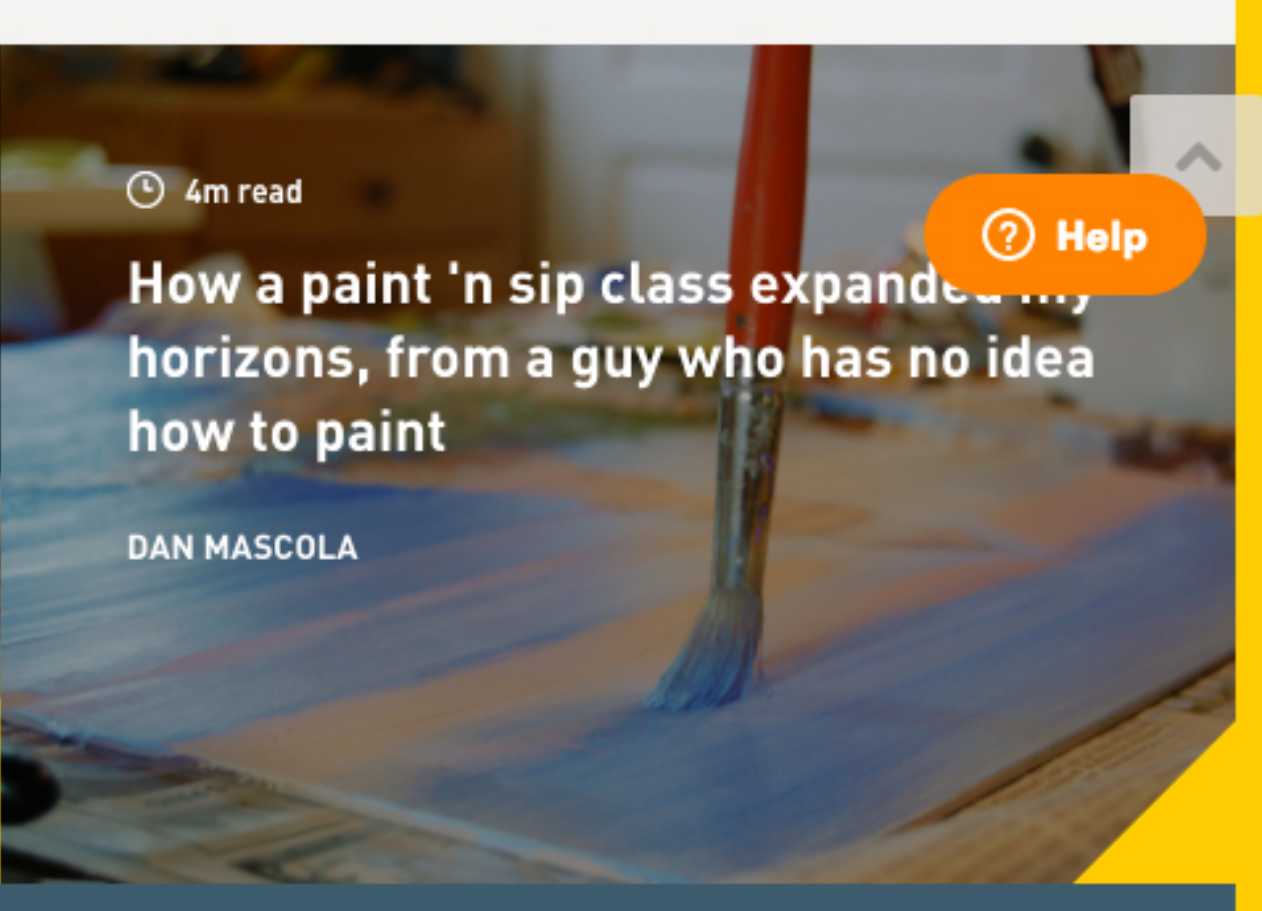

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